

Surajkund International Crafts Mela 2020



Discover India Program 2019-20

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report titled “*Surajkund International Crafts Mela*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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Abstract

The Surajkund International Crafts Mela takes place annually in Faridabad, Haryana. It was founded in 1987 by the Government of Haryana for one reason: to help uplift the best handicraft and handloom artists in the country who were keeping their cultural art forms alive, but did not receive the appreciation their skill, knowledge and hard-work warranted. The Surajkund Mela Authority worked towards its goal by setting up a platform where a limited number of expertly curated artists could meet each year for 15 days and showcase the best of their work to the world, raising awareness about their art-form and culture while netting sales in the process. In the 34 years since it was created, it has grown to become the largest crafts fair in the world and attract visitors and craftsmen from around the globe. The footfall in recent years has surpassed one million, and the Mela is expanding at a rapid pace.

While the event started off with wonderful intentions, a visitor walking into the Mela today is greeted with more distractions than pure art. Artists are unhappy with the way the Mela has evolved, as the organisation's priorities have shifted and the artists' sales have not scaled with the growth of the fair. The true artists are underappreciated and sidelined, as organisers and a majority of visitors focus on distractions that have multiplied as the Mela has scaled.

This paper aims to examine and critically analyse what the Surajkund Mela is today, what it stands for and how effective it actually is at the goal it had set out to accomplish: empower the best artists of India. To achieve this, this research paper relies largely on qualitative primary data: interviews conducted on-field at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela in 2020 to capture the sentiments and opinions of the artists and the consumers. A number of organisers have been interviewed as well to gain insights into the inner workings of this monumental event. Comparing these findings, trends have been noted and assessed to form a conclusive review of the Mela, with a focus on the perspective of its prime stakeholders: the artists the Mela was built for and around.

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Chapter 1: Introduction



Image 1: One of the many decorative gates at Surajkund Mela

1.1 About

Amongst the dusty, bustling plains of the NCR, an oasis of color materializes for two weeks each year. The Surajkund International Crafts Mela has been bringing together artists, art-enthusiasts and tourists together for 34 years now, since it was founded in 1987 by the Haryana Tourism Department (“Vision...” 2020). It started as a small gathering of select artists from around the country to showcase their work, from where it grew exponentially with growing support from consumers, and backing from various stakeholders.



Map 1: Map of Faridabad District (Maps of Faridabad)

Popularly known as the largest art-and-crafts festival in the world (“At a glance...” 2020) this grand festival presents itself as a hub for cultures to collide. Each year it showcases hundreds of art-forms from various different cultures: from performing arts to handicraft, to a base of lakhs of visitors: 13 lakh as of 2018. The Mela attracts international interest as well, with over 1 lakh visitors hailing from other nations (“32nd Surajkund International...”, 2018).



Map 2: Map of Surajkund Mela 2020 (Surajkund Mela 2020 Zone Division, 2020)

Each year, the theme and decor of the Mela is centered on an Indian state which determines the look, feel and atmosphere of the place. For 2020, the theme state was Himachal Pradesh (“Theme State...”, 2020). In addition to this, the Mela has a partner nation each year, which for 2020 was Uzbekistan (“Partner Nation...”, 2020).

1.2 Justification

After a series of thorough brainstorming sessions, the team concluded that a majority of members were inclined towards conducting research about a topic that would expose everyone to a new ethnic group or culture of India. What was found was exponentially better. The Surajkund Mela seemed to fit into the group’s interests perfectly: the opportunity of a lifetime, as it helped the team explore multiple cultures and how they interact with one another, as opposed to studying just one. Once the topic had been shortlisted, the next step was to decide what aspects of the Mela the research would be focused upon, and it was decided collectively to investigate the socio-cultural and economic variables present at the Mela.

As mentioned earlier, Surajkund Mela is a platform that brings together artists and performers not just from India, but from all over the world to come display the best of their cultures. Not only does the Mela facilitate the interaction between diverse people from around the world such as artists, performers, consumers and organisers, but also between varied cultures through artwork, handicrafts, handlooms and food. As it was known to be the world’s largest arts and crafts festival in terms of footfall and number of participants, the whole team was curious to know how it came to be what it is today, and what the Mela stood for.

Another reason undertaking this research was believed to be of paramount importance was the lack of academic documentation and general awareness about the Mela. Being such a large scale event involving a large amount of money and people, it was surprising to find barely any credible secondary data. The few articles that were found offered very basic data (mostly just a description of the event), and nothing really dug deep into the inner workings of the Mela. This did nothing but reinstate the need for the team to study the Surajkund Mela.

1.3 Research questions

1. To study the growth and evolution of the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, and how it has impacted the consumer and artists communities that participate in it.

2. To understand the involvement of various government institutions and the role they play in the functioning of the Mela.
3. To study the introduction of various commercial elements into the Mela and how they influence the Mela as it stands today.
4. To understand how the Mela has furthered its goal of uplifting meritorious artists and preserving the languishing crafts of India.

1.4 Aims & Objectives

- To understand the reason for the inception of the Mela and compare it to the current interests of the organisers.
- To understand the selection process for the artists presenting at the Mela.
- To understand how various government initiatives empower and uplift artists by providing a platform such as Surajkund.
- To find the reason for the increase in influx of traders and understand its impact on the Mela.
- To study the introduction of various elements of entertainment and their influence on the Mela.
- To trace the change in consumer behaviour and study the trends it establishes.

1.5 Methodology & Tools

‘Research methodology’ explains how the data collection and analysis for the report was carried out. The techniques used were selected to ensure a clear and streamlined process of gathering, compiling and interpreting the primary data for this project.

The team decided a qualitative approach was the most appropriate for the purpose of this research, and decided to conduct an exploratory study

1.6 Preliminary Research

Preliminary research formed the foundation of the team’s comprehension of the Surajkund Mela. This stage included collecting data from secondary sources, identifying and contacting eminent personalities in the field, and getting in touch with the Mela officially for a point-of-contact and permissions.

1.7 On-Field Research

The tools used for on-field data collection are discussed below:

1.7.1 Interviews

Interviews were of prime importance in on-field data collection. Interviews were semi-structured and emphasised open ended questions to encourage a free-flowing conversation about the topic. This fit the qualitative nature of the study, as opposed to a concise question-and-answer format.

A wide range of interviewees were chosen for the same, and included the following:

1. Organisers

Interviewing organisers was essential to understand the inner workings of the Mela, and officials were interviewed pre-field and on-field for the same.

Though the administration of the Mela was unavailable for interviews, the team interviewed officials on field, who could only dispense knowledge related to their specific sphere of expertise. An ex-member of the Surajkund Mela Authority (Ms. Jaya Jaitly) was also interviewed. Not only was she deeply involved in the organisation of the Mela but is also a very imminent personality in the field of art. Having also organised other art curations such as Delhi Haat and Dastakari Haat Samiti, she was able to present some very critical points that proved to be extremely valuable.

The organisers were informed about the team's research, and verbal consent was taken for each interview.

2. Artists and Stall Owners

The artists showcasing their skills and products at the Mela formed the very foundation the Mela was built upon. Since they were supposedly of paramount importance, the team's research prioritized them too, trying to understand their experience and the importance of the Mela in their lives.

Approximately 80 artists from different fields were interviewed for these purposes. Interviews were carried out on Mela grounds, and random sampling was used. Interviews were recorded through audio/visual forms of media. Verbal consent was taken from the artists for the interviews, detailing the nature and purpose of the research.

3. Consumers

For an accurate evaluation of the Mela, understanding the consumer's perspective was vital. These interviews aimed to gather data about consumer behavior, expectations and experiences. 100 consumers were interviewed during their time at the Mela, and random sampling was used. Interviews were recorded through audio/visual forms of media. Verbal consent was taken for the same, detailing the nature and purpose of the research paper.

1.7.2 Observation

Participant Observation was used to gather data as the entire team was actively participating in the Mela as visitors, each documenting their personal ideas about the fair. As the team spent many hours working at the Mela, each member's personal insight also furthered the team's comprehension of the Mela.

1.7.3 Audio and Video Tools

Audio and Video Tools were used to collect and document information about various aspects of the Mela. Other than documenting the interviews, shots encapsulating the essence of the Mela were captured with the intention of bringing the atmosphere of the fair to the viewer.

1.8 Post Field Research

The team carried on secondary research after the on-field portion of research was over. As new articles and sources had cropped up about Surajkund Mela 2020, this brought to light new information.

In the final stage, the team analysed the compilation of data for commonalities and trends, and carved clear, conclusive data out of the rough, raw information that was available.

1.9 Limitations

Much like any other research project, there were several limitations that the team faced during pre-field research. It was essential for the members to work around these barriers so everyone was better prepared for on-field research and had a fruitful experience.

The first and most fundamental step of pre-field research was gathering secondary data. Secondary data provides the researcher with context and gaps in literature, and helps map out the aims and objective of the research. Obtaining credible secondary data in the form of research

papers, scholarly articles, newspaper articles and audio-visuials proved to be difficult due to the lack of academic documentation. Even the sparse literature that was found was generic or irrelevant to what the team intended to study.

Further, officials from the Surajkund International Crafts Mela were unresponsive and therefore a point of contact could not be established on-field. As not much information regarding the Mela was available online initially, the team went on-field without knowing exactly what to expect, which posed to be a logistical issue.

Finally, due to the lack of information, the team was unaware of the rules and regulations of the Mela. The Mela website did not explicitly mention the permissions that would be required to conduct research and document the Mela visually, which led to uncertainty about the same.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

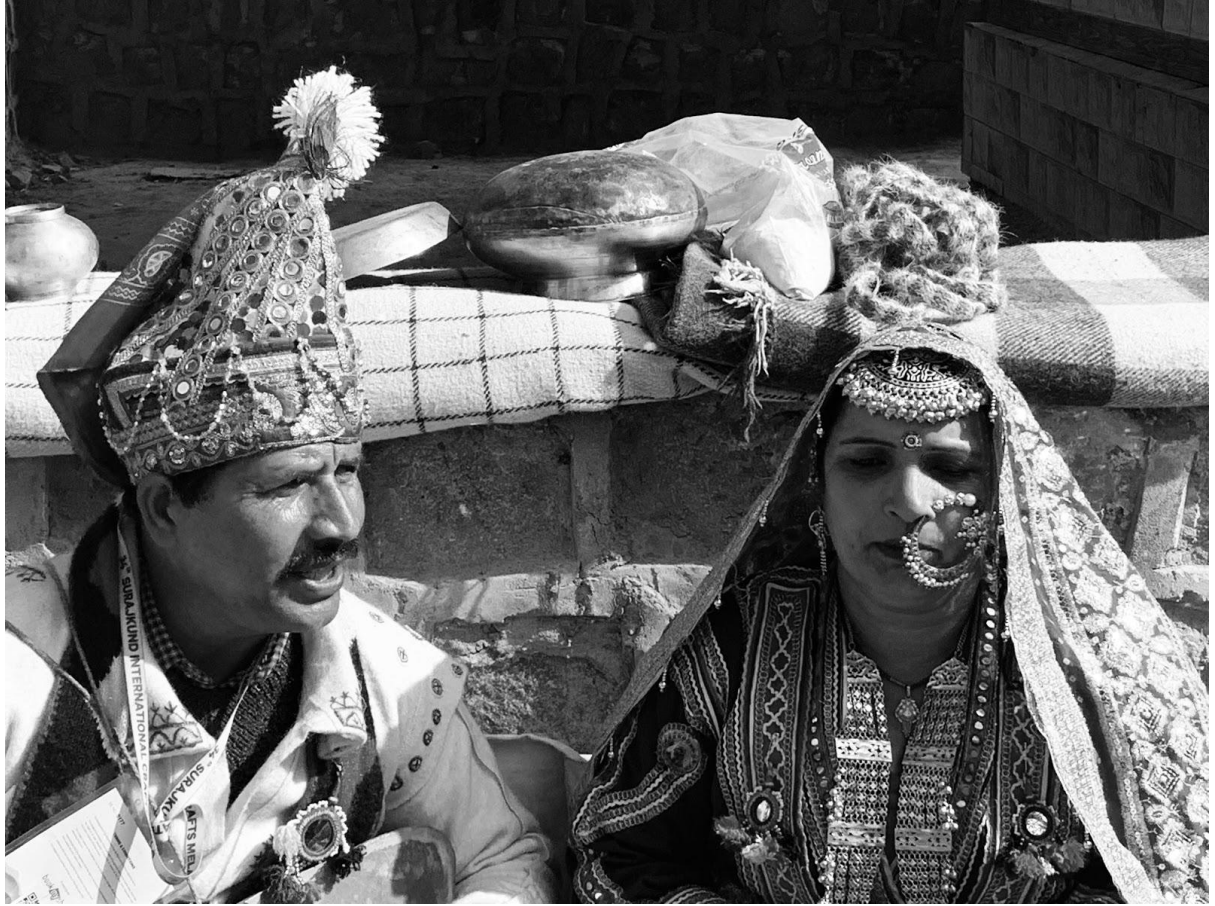


Image 2: Cultural performers at the Mela

The following chapter is an elaboration of the literature found with relation to the Surajkund Mela. Having barely found any credible secondary sources of information, most of the data utilized in the report is based on primary data collected on-field. However, the limited data available has been segregated into three broad categories: academic papers, newspaper articles and comparisons to other Melas.

2.1 Academic Papers

Of the only two academic papers that were available, the first one was published by Amity University. This paper on the Surajkund International Crafts Mela is written by Dr.Piyush Sharma, Dr. Mahesh C Uniyal and Prof. (Dr.) M. Sajnani of Amity University, Noida. The information solely gives the reader a basic introduction to the Mela. It does not go beyond the surface level hence, there is an absence of in-depth information. This paper further talks about the aims, objectives and features of the Mela. One point of interest in this paper was a study in consumer trends that provided data about the different demographics of the visitors and artisans who come to the Mela each year, presented in bar graphs. The analysis of the same is as follows:

1. Age group versus handicraft items

- Below 30 years - Most individuals stated that handicrafts were 'important' to them (30% of the general population).
- 30-45 years - The majority of people came to purchase handicrafts and thought it was the 'most important' part of the Mela (10% of the general population).
- 45-60 years- Handicrafts at the Mela were 'important' (8% of the general population).
- 60+ - Handicrafts were of 'average' importance (2% of the general population).

2. Age group and ethnic look of the fair

- Below 30 years- A majority of those under 30 stated the ethnic look was 'important' (26% of the general population).
- 30-45 years- A majority said it was the 'most important' factor to them (12% of the general population).
- 45-60 years- The majority said it was 'important' (10% of the general population).

3. Age group and cultural program

- Below 30 years- A majority considered it 'important' (30% of the general population).
- 30-45 years- Most people considered it the 'most important' factor (12% of the general population).
- 45-60 years- Most people said it was the 'most important' factor for them (6% of the general population).

4. Gender and location accessibility

- Males- 8% highly satisfied, 38% satisfied, 6% nor satisfied or unsatisfied.
- Females- 4% highly satisfied, 36% satisfied, 6% nor satisfied or unsatisfied.

5. Gender and quality of food

- Males- 4% highly satisfied, 42% satisfied.
- Females- 8% highly satisfied, 30% satisfied.

6. Gender and behaviour of artist

- Males- 4% highly satisfied, 30% satisfied, 18% neutral.
- Females- 6% highly satisfied, 28% satisfied, 10% neutral.

7. Gender and quality of handicrafts

- Males - 4% highly satisfied, 44% satisfied.
- Females- 12% highly satisfied, 34% satisfied.

8. Gender and cost of handicraft

- Males - 4% highly satisfied, 18% satisfied, 24% Neutral and 6% dissatisfied.
- Females - 6% highly satisfied, 16% satisfied, 16% neutral and 8% dissatisfied.

9. Gender and value for money on entrance fee

- Males - 4% highly satisfied, 22% satisfied and 22% neutral.
- Females - 4% highly satisfied, 28% satisfied and 14% neutral.

The overall satisfaction level of visitors: Very good: 18%, Good: 56%, Moderate: 22% and Poor: 4%.

Though this data is helpful in the furthering of this paper's goals, the presentation of this data is ineffective as the population is segregated by age and gender categories and portrayed on the same graph. For example, it is expressed that 4% of the population were males and 'highly satisfied' with the entrance fee, instead of calculating what percentage of males were 'highly satisfied'.

The second academic paper was written by a student. It is a case study of the Surajkund Mela that focuses primarily on how the techniques and means of production of handicrafts has changed from being hand-made to being made on machines as a result of change in tastes and preferences of the consumers.

These crafts are unique expressions of various cultures, traditions and communities. With an increase in globalization, products are becoming more commoditized and artisans find it difficult to compete with goods from all over the world. Millions of Indians still depend on these indigenous methods of production, techniques, and craft-making to make a living out of it.

2.2 Newspaper Articles

Although there isn't much literature available on the Surajkund Mela, there are a few articles about the Mela that lend insight into the inner functioning and striking features of the Mela. The Newspaper articles have further been divided thematically. These themes are aligned with some elements that are prominent in later parts of this paper.

2.3 History

Surajkund is an ancient reservoir of the 10th century located on the Southern Delhi Ridge of the Aravalli range in the city of Faridabad, Haryana about 8 km from South Delhi(Sharma). Surajkund is known for its annual fair "Surajkund International Craft Mela", and the 2015 edition of this fair was visited by 1.2 million visitors including 160,000 foreigners with more than 20 countries participating in it("29th Surajkund International...", 2015).

2.4 Notable Stalls

Surajkund Mela has a wide variety of stalls. In 2016, the Human Kind Foundation, an NGO that works towards spreading awareness about the sustainable disposal of waste products set up a stall at the Mela. At their stall, they had a wide range of composters displayed which helped in converting kitchen waste into manure for plants(Kumar, 2016). In the same year, Mitti Cool also set up at the Mela with the motive of raising awareness about keeping the environment

clean while giving back to nature. They displayed a vast variety of colourful cookware of various designs made from clay.

2.5 Empowerment


The Surajkund Mela empowers a number of minority communities. The ‘Haryana Welfare Society for Persons with Speech and Hearing Impairment’ is one of the country’s largest and oldest organisations working towards the overall development of people with speech and hearing impairment in Haryana and its neighbouring states. In 2018, this organisation set up a stall where all the items that were up for sale were made by their students. They did this with the intention to sensitise society towards the community and initiate social integration (“Stall with a difference...”, 2018).

In 2016, Surajkund Mela provided the opportunity to prison inmates of Haryana to showcase their art and skills by having a stall at the Mela. Their stall displayed the different art products crafted by these inmates, made from paper, wood and straw. These inmates were given training in tailoring, chocolate making, etc. and were able to curate a collection of wall hanging, wood crafted animals, hand painted sceneries and many more handicrafts (Kumar, 2016).

2.6 International Involvement

As previously mentioned, Surajkund Mela partners with a different country every year in order to showcase their culture alongside India’s own. This allows the Mela to bring in many international stalls from different countries that bring something new to the visitors, the Mela and the country each year. In 2016, Faizi Kaabi, a Tunisian craftsperson brought an array of Olive wood utility items like chopping boards, salad bowls, chess boards, mortar and pestle and fruit trays in very unconventional shapes and sizes. “Olive wood carved in various shapes has been generating equal interest amongst visitors, as there is a craze for olive oil due to the health benefits it offers” said Kaabi (Kumar, 2016).

In 2017, the theme state was Jharkhand and the partner nation was Egypt. Besides Egypt, more than 20 countries from Europe, Africa and South Asia participated and artists from Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mongolia participated for the first time (Garg, 2017).

	<p>Name: Shahla Saadat</p> <p>Place of Origin: Afghanistan</p> <p>Age: 47</p> <p>Occupation: Jeweller</p>
<p>Thoughts about the Mela: “I really like it here as the people are very curious about the type of jewellery I make and sell and they buy it willingly. I am proud to be a woman representative of my country in the Mela. I hope to come next year as well”</p>	

Box 1: Shahla Saadat’s Story

Uzbekistan was the partner nation for the 34th Surajkund Mela held in 2020. Multiple artists and performers came to the Mela as Uzbekistan holds a very unique position in the world of handicrafts. For the Uzbeks, their culture and heritage is their pride and identity and hence, their art has been carefully preserved and passed on from one generation to the next in the form of wood work and other decorative items. The Persian and Oriental styled designs and bright turquoise colours reflect upon the infinite beauty which these ceramic decorations hold. The blue and white colour represents sky and water which is believed to bring in happiness and prosperity (“Uzbekistan craftsmen impress...”, 2020).

2.7 Impact of Technology

The Mela since its inception to present day has seen major development in terms of technology. In the 29th edition of the Surajkund International Crafts Mela in 2015, the feature of online portals was introduced by Mela officer Sumita Mishra, where artists could register for the Mela through the portal and gain access to ready markets. Online shopping services such as Flipkart and Snapdeal were invited to help artists be a part of the e-commerce ecosystem (“Haryana: Online shopping...”, 2015). The Mela also introduced other initiatives in 2020. This included a free mobile application ‘Surajkund Mela’ for smartphones and an online ticket booking through ‘BookMyShow’ (“Haryana: Online shopping...”, 2015).

Due to the demonetisation being introduced in 2016, the Surajkund Mela authorities decided to go cashless from the 31st Surajkund International Crafts Fair. They wanted to introduce 100% cashless transactions at the Mela. Dena Bank, the official bank partner, was

asked to provide 100 point of sale machines, a dedicated bank branch with 2 ATMs and 6 mobile ATM vans. Mobikwik, an e-wallet app, was their official cashless wallet partner (Garg, 2017).

2.8 Comparison to Other Melas

The Surajkund Mela started in 1987 making it a very young Mela when compared to other Melas of similar scale that take place in the country such as the Kumbh Mela, Dilli Haat, Gandhi Shilp Mela etc. (Spot, n.d.).

The Surajkund Mela and Dilli Haat are both organised by the Government of India and their main aim is to provide a platform for artists all over the country to showcase their handicrafts and sell their products. The Government bodies involved in organising these Melas are the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts, Development Commissioner of Handlooms, Ministry of Textile and the Ministry of Tourism (“Haryana Tourism”, n.d.). They both go on for 15 days, and have cultural performances and a huge food court with a wide array of Indian cuisine. There are three Dilli Haats when compared to only one big Surajkund Mela. The original Dilli Haat has only 62 stalls (Verma, 2011) and is spread over 6 acres of land (Cook, 2019) whereas the Surajkund Mela has about 1200 stalls spread across 40 acres (“Haryana Tourism”, n.d.).

The footfall at Dilli Haat on a daily basis is approximately 300 people on a regular day. When there are special events, this number increases to 5000-6000 (Sultan, 2019). As for the Surajkund Mela, the footfall is about 1.3 lakh visitors a day. This vast difference in footfall tells us that Dilli Haat is a small and focused festival whereas Surajkund Mela takes place on a much larger scale.

The Dastkari Haat Samiti Mela was founded in 1986 by Mrs. Jaya Jaitly who has succeeded in bringing 1400 artisans and craftsmen from all around India to help them gain recognition (Mukherjee, 2018). This festival goes on for 15 days, just like the Surajkund Mela. The main aim of this Mela is to have a small number of artisans: 180 in total to display and sell their handicrafts.

Gandhi Shilp Melas are organized in consideration with important fairs/festivals/historic places and places of tourist interest. The usual duration of one is about 7-10 days, and they accommodate 60-100 stalls with a maximum financial limit of 26 lakhs (“Gandhi Shilp...”, 2011). There are multiple Gandhi Shilp Mela (GSM) that are organized in different metropolitan cities of the country in comparison to one single Surajkund Mela that is organized every year in Faridabad, Haryana.

The Gandhi Shilp Mela receives financial aid from AP Handicrafts, Development Corporation, development commission from handicraft, ministry of textile, govt. of India, New Delhi. The Surajkund Mela is largely funded by Haryana tourism along with other participants such as the Uttar Pradesh government, NABARD, and the partner nation. The Surajkund Mela has a different partner nation every year that narrows down the theme of the Mela, unlike Gandhi Shilp Melas. For one particular edition, an article quoted: “The main purpose of this Gandhi Shilp Bazaar is to create marketing facility during day and night time in view of Ramazan and Vinayaka Chavithi” ("Gandhi Shilp Bazaar...", 2011).

2.9 Gaps in Literature

While the biggest challenge was not having credible and relevant secondary sources of data, there were other challenges and gaps with respect to literature. The first was the lack of information about the organisation or logistical aspects of the Mela that posed as a barrier to the planning process. Secondly, there was no information about the theme state and what kind of significance it held at the Mela. The literature found only provided a generic insight into the history of the Mela and some of the notable attractions. There was no in-depth information about the socio-economic factors at play in the Mela, and all of these factors affected the pre-field research.

Chapter 3: Observations and Inferences



Image 3: Actor dressed in a mythological costume waiting to interact with customers at the Mela

3.1 Evolution

3.1.1 Increasing Footfall & Physical Space

The Surajkund Mela first began in 1987 and has been growing ever since. Before the large-scale development of the Surajkund Mela, it was a simple congregation of distinguished artists, brought together by the Ministry of Textiles. The purpose of the Mela was to showcase the best crafts of the country to the whole world. As the nomenclature suggests, the main focus of the Mela was supposed to be the different crafts that India has to offer. The Mela aimed to promote traditional art by uplifting the artists dedicating their lives to them. To maintain a standard of quality, the Mela's organizers chose mainly national and state award winners.

Since the Mela first opened, the interest it received annually increased manifold along with the sheer scale of the event. Footfall at the Mela varied greatly throughout the 15 days of the Mela, with numbers peaking on weekends and increasing gradually towards the latter days of the event. The great crowds it amassed signified the attention it received on a national and international level, and the identity the Mela has created for itself.

The footfall of the Mela has been increasing steadily since 1987. Though the Surajkund Mela Authority did not release official footfall numbers each year, most secondary literature suggests a steady increase from 7 lakh total visitors in 2008 ("7 lakh footfalls...", 2008) to 13 lakh in 2019 (Saxena, 2020). There was no information found about the number of visitors before the year 2008.



Image 4: One of the many crowded lanes of the Surajkund Mela

As the population of visitors and artists at the event had grown, the Mela has also had to develop more physical space to expand Surajkund Mela Grounds. It spans for 40 acres, and the stalls and attractions stretch across the entirety of it.

The number of artists participating has also increased significantly. Towards its beginning, the Mela had fewer than 300 stalls (Jaitly, 2020) and was spread out more, but as the number of stalls has increased to over a thousand now, it is more condensed. Stalls are closer together, and outdoor stalls on mats spread on the ground have been introduced. According to some stall-owners this poaches sales from the larger designated stalls as these outdoor stalls are often in front of them and steal the customer's attention. The Mela in its recent years has only gotten more and more crowded, and most consumers agree it is a struggle to navigate, particularly on days when the crowd surges.

As the fair has grown physically, a number of elements have been introduced to push the limits it earlier confined itself to. The Mela was upgraded to an international level in 2013, and over 20 countries participated in 2020 ("Surajkund International Crafts," n.d.). Though this might seem like a positive change on the surface, it cannot be ignored that the premise of the Mela was to uplift indigenous art, and this decision to make the fair international takes part of the limelight away from indigenous artists. Since there are multiple stalls selling similar goods, there is often competition between them. For example, in 2020, there were 59 stalls selling sarees at the Mela, with numerous stalls selling the same kind (from the same state, and with similar handiwork). Interviews found that most artists do not object to this, as there is a feeling of camaraderie within them, but they do feel like the international stalls steal attention and sales away. Year after year, the number of international stalls has only increased, and though it may work to attract more visitors, it can be debated whether this is in the best interests of the Mela.

3.1.2 Diversity of Products

With over 1000 stalls present at the Mela, the range of products is as diverse as one would expect, with products suited to every kind of consumer. The main focus of the Mela is Handicrafts and Handloom items, and this has been maintained since its inception. The products sold under handicrafts include jewellery, sculptures, carved idols, furniture, pottery, paintings, home decor items, puppets, metal crafts, wooden idols and engravings, wooden toys, jute crafts and many more ("Haryana Tourism...", 2020). Handloom products include sarees, duppattas, suit material, stoles, scarfs, shawls, kurtis, jackets and even bed linen ("Haryana Tourism...", 2020).

Within these categories, quality and style varied greatly from stall to stall. But alongside these items, it was interesting to see some stalls that were not what could be considered authentic. Stalls selling miscellaneous goods like mass-produced key-chains, phone covers, stuffed toys, plastic-ware, steel utensils etc. were present, and seemed out of place.

3.1.3 Taste of Consumers

‘Art can never get lost because if you love it, you love it and those who love it, come for it’ (Rita, 2020). Rita, an artist from Ghana explains how art is all about love for her, and her ideology fits in with the intention of the Mela: bringing the artists closer to the consumer. But with time, the preferences and taste of consumers at the Mela have evolved in several different directions.

Interviews with artists and consumers found that preferences of visitors at the Mela vary greatly. There was a notable difference in preferences by age group. It was noticed that the younger age range does not have the same taste as the older, and due to the generation gap, ideas of art, culture and aesthetics have also evolved.

As the demographic of visitors varies greatly from age to cultural identity, drawing generalizations is difficult. But there is a noticeable difference in the Mela’s target audience. Initially the Mela targeted art enthusiasts: visitors with high purchasing intent. But in recent years, it has become a popular tourist attraction. As tourists typically have low purchasing intent, a few trends can be identified. Most artists who had been coming to the Mela since the first few years agreed that their sales have not gone up in proportion to the rise in the number of visitors. They believed that the common public that the Mela is now pulling in does not have an eye for quality and detail, and does not discern the difference between their intricate, exquisite art and the kinds of trinkets and wares one might see at a roadside market. As the Mela’s customer base has gotten larger and more diverse, art enthusiasts with high purchasing power are still present, it is just that they are outnumbered by people who come to the Mela for a fun outing, to just see what it offers. Such visitors have low intent to purchase goods, and even if they do, tend to flock towards the cheaper goods each stall offers.

The artists and stall-owners have noticed this change, and have begun to tailor their products accordingly. For example, a stall selling exquisite, hand-painted Pattachitra paintings that range from Rs. 3000-12000 can be seen selling cheaply made, printed bookmarks for Rs. 20. A stall selling intricate, hand-made terracotta figures also sells small Ganapati figurines that came out of a mould, for 5 rupees. This gives the artists quick sales from the customers who may

not appreciate the art as much as a serious enthusiast, but do want to take home souvenirs from the fair.

3.1.4 Change in products and production

Various changes, many of which can be attributed to modernization and globalization, have affected the sustainability of the traditional art-forms showcased at the Mela. Artists now have to compete with fast-fashion giants, cheaper copies of their own work and various other methods of mass production that make similar products. To cope with these changes in their external environment, the production styles and techniques used by some of these artists has also changed over time. Some artists have even started partnering with larger brands instead of competing with them, and sell their products to retail outlets, the likes of Fab India. Praful Solanki: a tie-and-dye artist from Ahmedabad even buys plain t-shirts from international fashion brands, then dyes and sells them (Solanki, 2020).

A number of handloom artists have migrated completely to the power loom as it makes the process much easier and faster, thus making the product cheaper. As these products have to compete with the cheaper products on the market, this helps the artist sell higher quantities, and end up with larger revenue.

Certain raw-materials have dwindled in supply with time and increase in demand, as businesses have scaled up. Some artists who traditionally used natural paint sourced from their surrounding wilderness have had to transition to commercially available acrylic paint (Sham, 2020). For example, A Madhubani Artist said that his parents and grandparents used colors sourced for natural things such as haldi, but he now uses water paints as they're easily accessible and cheaper.

The Surajkund Mela also acts as a platform for artist-consumer interactions, and provides artists (or traders) with feedback, which in turn influences the evolution of the products. An Artist from Uttar Pradesh said “jo bhi customer kehta hai waisa banana lagte hai”, translating to “we start making the products according to the requests of the customer” (Majid, 2020). Multiple artists that were interviewed stated that the younger generation is not as impressed by ornate, intricate ‘karigari’ and prefers simpler designs, so that is what they end up making more of. Consumers might request a certain colour which the artists do not produce at that moment, so they make note of it, and try to come back with it the following year. Occasionally, artists also get inspired by designs from other forms of art from other cultures, and incorporate it into their own work. A crockery maker from Uttar Pradesh spoke about how he liked the design he saw on

a pair of pants at the Mela, and designed cups and saucers with the same colour and patterns, which sold very well (Majid, 2020). This intermingling of cultures at the fair results in a lot of variation in traditional art.

Another trend amongst the current demographic that artists spoke about is the decreased appreciation for pure and premium fabrics. For instance, pure silk sarees are expensive, and consumers not willing to pay such high prices can choose from silk-linen and silk-cotton blends that are cheaper. With time, these blends have risen in popularity, and artists have started producing more of them.

Though the Mela was created with the intention of focusing on high-quality handicraft, consumers often prefer cheaper items like mass produced artificial jewellery and clothes. Therefore, artists have also started selling cheaper, lower quality products to compete in this market.

3.1.5 New Attractions

During the inception of the Mela, it was primarily intended to be centred around curated, quality art. What the Mela was envisioned to be and what it has become is a long and interesting journey. As the number-one focus of the organisers shifted from the artists to the expansion of the Mela and making it bigger and better every year, things started changing drastically. The organizers were compelled to come up with other attractions to maintain a steady in-flow of customers and to attract new visitors. These attractions included dance and musical performances, drawing competitions, rides such as the ferris wheel, people dressed up as clowns and mythological characters, and fashion shows.

There were a wide number of dance and music performances that kept taking place throughout the day at different locations. There was a centrally located main-stage, displaying the dance and music of both national and international troupes. These performances were heavily advertised by the Haryana Tourism Department to attract larger crowds to the Mela. The Mela's Instagram page constantly updated people about the different performances scheduled throughout the duration of the Mela. While the dance and music performances added a cultural component to the Mela, the rest of the attractions just added to the chaos and commotion.



Image 5: Louis Vuitton design on a tradition Pashmina shawl to attract young customers

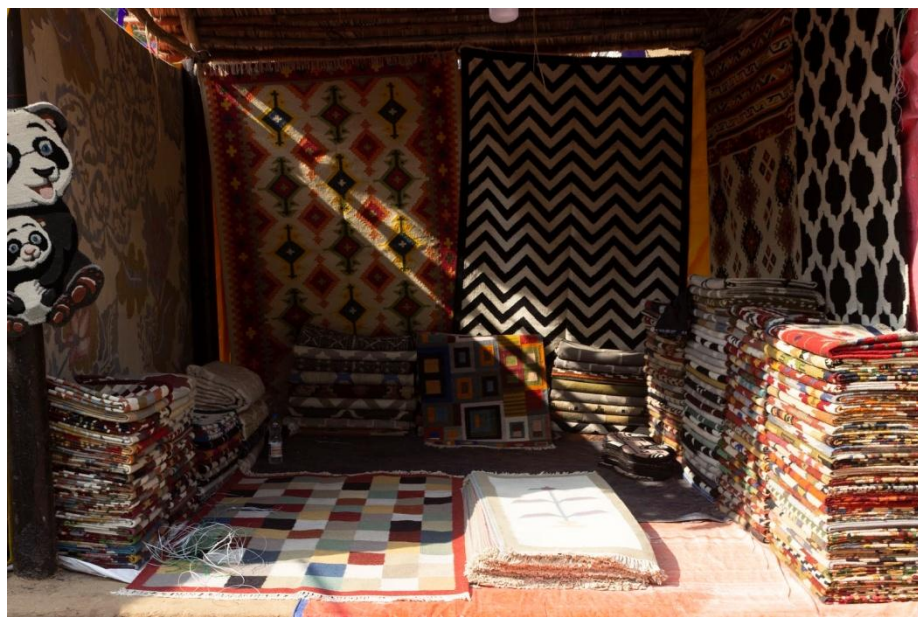


Image 6: Commercial stalls selling mass produced carpets with trendy designs

In 2020, however, the rides were taken off the list of attractions. While the reason for shutting these rides down is unclear, many believed that it was due to the exorbitant prices charged by the vendors. Others believed that it was due to the various accidents and mishaps that took place the previous year. “Jhoola kechakkar mein aadmi mar gaye”, an artist quoted when interviewed, translating to “Some people died on the rides” (Kumar, 2020). Some stall owners believed the lack of rides at Surajkund Mela 2020 ‘made it feel less like a Mela’, resulting in poor sales (Kumar, 2020).

One of the biggest attractions of 2020's Mela was the Fashion show organized by Ritu Beri, a well-known fashion designer. Her fashion show was called 'Naturally North-East: The Naga Narrative' which was a first of its kind. This show was organized in association with Tribes India and the Surajkund Mela Authority ("Ministry of Tribal...", 2020). It aimed to showcase the beautiful Naga weave with modern touches and various products from the region.

As the years have passed and the attractions have grown gradually, the sheer quantity of the entertainment options has seemed to overwhelm the Mela and draw attention away from the primary stakeholders; the artists. Another problem this has caused is that the kind of crowd that these leisure activities brought in, are people who came to the Mela to look around, watch the performances, eat and leave. This is not the viewership that artists need to propagate their art and make a livelihood.



Image 7: Nairobi dance group showcasing their ethnic dance at the Mela



Image 8: Performers from the Partner Nation, Uzbekistan putting up a show a cultural show

3.2 Government Involvement

Multiple government entities have gotten involved with the Surajkund Crafts Mela as it has grown over time and this impacts the functioning of the event deeply. These government bodies run numerous schemes that allow artists access to the event, and help them by sponsoring the expenses they incur at the Mela. Some of the prominent government bodies and their functions are discussed below.

3.2.1 Government Schemes

1. NABARD

A fundamental problem that the National Bank of Rural Development identified with respect to artists was that they were not equipped with the right skill-sets to market themselves. As the world moved towards a global marketplace, rural artists started to get increasingly isolated. Not being able to market their products created a fall in the demand which adversely impacted their income as most of their customers were from the locality.

They aim to solve this problem through various marketing interventions in the Mela with rural artists as their beneficiaries. NABARD provides direct marketing opportunities to rural artists to help them sell their products to customers in larger cities. Furthermore, the feedback and direct marketing exposure helps the artists improve their skills. NABARD exposes around 200 artists every year at the Mela helping artists generate an approximate turnover of Rs. 25 lakh – Rs. 60 lakh for the last 5 years (“Nabard...”, n.d.). NABARD has helped empower many sections of society, and has worked extensively with women. For example, An elderly artist from Karnal was situated in the NABARD zone, and talked about how she worked with nearly 7000-8000 women. These women were divided into groups and then helped get in touch with the bank to get a loan (“Nabard...”, n.d.).



Name: Vimala Rathore

Place of Origin: Karnal,
Haryana

Age: 62

Occupation: Founder of a training centre funded by NABARD that trains more than 500 women in

different activities like making jute bags, jewellery, pottery, pickle making, cultivating mushrooms and so much more.

Thoughts on the Mela: “It gives me a platform to tell people about my organisation and people buy our products because they are cheap. A lot of our revenue is generated here.”

“Mein logo kimadad karna chahtihu, jitnahi sake utna”
“I want to help people, as much that I can”

Box 2: Vimala Rathore’s Story

Further, they were given vocational training to make jewellery, jute bags, pottery, pickle, lassi and ghee, cultivate mushrooms and were even trained for other skill building activities. NABARD gave them a stall at the Mela paying for their rent, food and stay. This stall displayed products made by these women and the profits go towards the betterment of these financially struggling women. NABARD makes a concession and gives them a loan without asking to mortgage anything as they have nothing under their name- no land, no house, no property. They buy the materials and resources from that money.

2. Ministry of External Affairs

Being an international arts and crafts Mela, the Ministry of External Affairs plays an integral role in the organisation of the Mela. They along with other officials are responsible for picking a Partner Nation each year and catering to all their needs. They are also in charge of inviting and hosting all the travelled artists which forms a large component of the Mela. The Ministry of External Affairs makes sure that The Surajkund Mela holds a prominent place in the global forum for arts and crafts, expecting to draw a large international footfall. The Ministry is responsible for the country’s representation in the United Nations and maintains ties with other Ministries and State Governments while dealing with foreign governments or institutions (“Ministry of...”, 2017). For example, Lucy and Daisy were two women working with the

British Council and had come to the Mela through the Ministry of External Affairs and the Government of the UK. They owned a couture fashion studio in London since 2007 who worked keeping in mind sustainable development by undertaking eco-friendly and guilt free measures. They had on display a dress: a showpiece that they were working on. Instead of curating a regular line of collection, they decided to work on one dress where instead of buying a dress, they sold the idea of buying a word to be embroidered on the dress. All these words were relating to feminism, to propagate a sense of solidarity and unison amongst women. This dress travelled all across the globe and women from across nations bought words that they believed empower women. There is also a list of all the words on their website listing who the word was from and who it was dedicated to. They were trying to tell the story of the garment, and explain what was happening instead of just selling a normal dress. When asked what their incentive to attend the Mela was, they said that it was the incredible work that female artists in India do, that they were familiar with as they had connections with a lot of inspiring women from all over the country.

3. Ministry of Tourism

The Ministry of Tourism is a prominent stakeholder of Surajkund Mela. It helps formulate various policies that directly and indirectly affect Surajkund. It acts as a bridge between various central government agencies, State Governments and Private Sector companies to propagate tourism in the country. They help the Mela increase footfall through publicity and also provide financial assistance for the same. The details are as follows:

- The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India would provide a maximum financial assistance of Rs. 25.00 Lakh per fair / festival / event in the case of States (“Government of India...”, 2010)
- Maximum financial assistance to be provided to each State Government during 1 financial year should not exceed Rs. 50.00 lakh (“Government of India...”, 2010).

4. Development Commissioner of Handlooms

The Development Commissioner of Handlooms was one of the founding collaborators of the Surajkund Mela. Currently, its function under the Ministry of Textiles is to help in the upliftment of small local weavers and sponsor them to showcase their work on a platform like Surajkund. They provide assistance in terms of training, finances, design and marketing (“Handloom Development Scheme”, 2020).

5. SC/ST Hub

In order to assist Handloom Weavers as a whole, including the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women weavers, the Government of India has been implementing many schemes through State Governments for the overall development of the handloom sector. Since most of the handloom weavers are below the poverty line and belong to the marginalised section of the society, the Government has made the welfare of the weavers a primary concern (“SCST and women...”, 2002).

The Haryana government invites these SC/ST artists to participate in the Mela through an application process. These artists are part of various schemes such as UdyogBhavan and self help groups that further help them showcase their art (“Official website of...”, 2020). In the Mela, there is a separate zone dedicated for the artists that belonged to members of scheduled castes or scheduled tribes who have taken loans from the government to set up their businesses. Outside each stall, there was a display that mentioned the loan amount taken and how much of it had been paid back. A majority of the earnings from the Mela were used to repay this loan (“Official website of...”, 2020).

Some of the other government institutions involved in organisations of the Mela are Ministry of Tourism, Textile, Culture, External Affairs, the Government of Haryana and Haryana Tourism Corporation, ICCR, Haryana Legal Services and the BetiBachaoBetiPadhao initiative.

For the most part, the government empowers most sections of society but doesn’t cater to the need of the local small artists that have no means to be at a platform such as Surajkund. For an artist to be at Surajkund they either had to be skilled enough to receive a State or National Award, or have enough financial backing to rent a stall costing up to a to 1 lakh rupees. Thus, while most artists are satisfied with the schemes of the government, some artists are unhappy as the support of the government has reduced over the years.



Image 9: Local weaver working with a handloom on the Mela grounds



Image 10: Artist from Andhra Pradesh working on his art; wood carving

3.2.2 Screening Process

At its inception, the Surajkund Mela intended to invite only state and national award-winning artists, and highlight the crafts that they made so painstakingly. The Ministry of Textiles was the sole sponsor, and not more than 300 craftspeople were selected by them. For the Mela's first edition in 1987, individual invites were sent out to these award-winning artists (Jaitly, 2020).

This approach was maintained till the Surajkund Mela Committee realised a problem. There are only about 20 national awards given out each year, and after a few years they ran out, with some of them being too old to visit the fair themselves, and some having passed away. Ms. Jaya Jaitly, a member of the aforementioned committee at the time, believes that there are artists who are just as good as the awardees but do not get the awards for a variety of reasons. These reasons included a corrupt and arduous selection process for the awards, with instances of bribery, and even undeserving candidates receiving the award because they bought handicrafts from a skilled artist and submitted them as their own (without the artist even knowing that his/her work was being submitted). Ms. Jaitly wanted to expand the pool that artists were chosen from, so that they were "curate(d) from the best, rather than just awardees" (Jaitly, 2020).

Currently, Ms. Jaitly believes the process for the selection of awardees is honest again, as voices were raised and the corruption was quelled.

Information gathered from artist interviews and guidelines stated by the Ministry of Textiles details the selection process as it stands currently (2020) as follows. Handloom artists and weavers are nominated by the Office of Development Commissioner Handlooms and Development Commissioner Handicrafts for participation based on the recommendation of the State Commissioner/Director and Weavers Service Centres ("Ministry of Textiles...", 2017).

National Awardees, State Awardees, Shilp Guru Award Holders (Conferred by the Indian Government to outstanding artists innovating different styles and designs in traditional art forms), SantKabir Award Holders (Conferred by the Indian Government to selected weavers who have made a significant contribution to keeping the handloom culture alive) and other Merit Certificates receivers having Pehchan Identity Card for participation in Dilli Haat, Surajkund Mela, INA, etc. Are contacted and given an invite to set up their stalls at the Mela. The Shilp Guru and SantKabir Awardees are given first preference while National Awardees and Merit Certificates are given second preference (Jaitly, 2020). After these stalls are allotted, the vacant and remaining ones are offered to State Awardees.

The allotment of stalls is rotated every two years except the Sant Kabir and Shilp Guru Award holders who are nominated every year. The artists that are invited to set up their stalls are reimbursed for most of the costs they might incur such as travel, lodging and food. Their stalls are paid for by the concerned government agency that invites them. The organisations that work with the international stalls owners are approached by the Government of India and are invited to set up their stalls at the Mela since 2014 (“Ministry of Textiles...”, 2017).

Other than those selected by the state governments and the Ministry of Textiles, craftspeople can send in their applications to the Surajkund Mela Authority or their state government to be selected. They must attach a copy of their artisan identity card (identifying them as an artisan, verified by the government) that details the artform they practice and their personal information. Apart from this, there is even a ‘lucky draw’ for the right to set up a stall which an artisan may enter, and even paid stalls have been introduced. Paid stalls did not exist when the Mela was founded, as the inculcation of this into the Mela demonstrates a major shift in the intent of the event.

In the recent years of the Mela, the selection process is not nearly as exclusive as it used to be. In 2020, over 1000 stalls were present. This shift in the Mela’s focus from quality to quantity can be attributed to the government and committee’s aim to increase the scale of the event, and draw in a larger audience. This has impacted the Mela deeply, and it has disconnected from the very cause it was created for, as now a majority of the stall-owners are believed to be traders and not artists at all (Jaitly, 2020).

3.3 Commercialisation

In the words of Haryana Tourism, ‘The Mela was conceived primarily to promote the pool of skilled artisans, who used indigenous technology, but were suffering due to the cheaper machine-made imitations. This is an earnest effort by Surajkund Mela Authority & Haryana Tourism to provide a platform for craftspeople and wavers to directly market their wares by eliminating the middlemen’ (“Vision...” ,2020). This section of the paper questions the accuracy of this statement, and reveals how the Mela has strayed from its vision.


3.3.1 Influence of Traders

One of the most significant changes the Surajkund Mela has seen over time is the replacement of genuine, talented artists with traders who purchase goods in bulk from similar artists and set up stalls at the Mela to sell. According to Ms. Jaya Jaitly, “70% are traders and not

craftsmen, diluting the authenticity of the Mela” (Jaitly, 2020). This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the presence of traders at the event is completely against what the Mela was created for, which is to act as a platform to showcase the best artists of the country. The artists are deeply invested in their creations, and bring the best of their work not only to sell but to also increase awareness of their art-form and culture. Traders completely diverge from this purpose as they usually do not have thorough knowledge about the art-form and the culture it represents. In the many interviews that were conducted, traders were able to answer only the most basic questions, avoiding the ones that inquired too deeply. Artists, on the other hand, were always open to (and seemed to enjoy) a thorough conversation about their artwork. They knew everything there was to know about it, and revealed everything from the process of procuring raw materials to the symbolisms found on their pieces, and the history behind them.

The artists at the Mela were generally very apprehensive of the traders they had to compete with. Abdul Majid, a crockery maker from Uttar Pradesh was stationed right opposite another crockery stall who he claimed was a trader. Majid was visibly upset about this, and stated that him having to compete with the trader was demeaning for him, as he often copied his designs. While Majid had dedicated his life to this craft and had worked hard to get to the Mela, the trader could just buy similar crockery (that might not be of the same quality) in bulk and match Majid’s price. This provided the artist with unfair competition, and deeply angered him (Majid, 2020).

Secondly, even if they are not selling similar products of inferior quality, the influx of traders drives up the price of the products sold at the Mela. This is because they serve as middlemen and sell products at a higher price than what the artist asks. This is against the interests of the consumers at the fair. Another effect this hiking of prices has is that it encourages bargaining. Since the prices the traders ask are beyond what the average consumer expects and values the items at, they ask for a lower price. Traders engage in this, and this creates the general idea that bargaining is the norm at the Mela. The artists are unhappy with the situation this has created and view bargaining as an insult to their art. The products sold by the artists often boasts intricate detail and amazing handiwork that takes months and even years to complete, and yet they sell them at reasonable prices. Unfortunately, now the consumer bargains out of habit, cutting the artists profits and demeaning the hard work behind the art.

	<p>Name: Bina Pathar</p> <p>Place of Origin: Bihar</p> <p>Age: 73</p> <p>Occupation: Madhubani Artist</p>
<p>More about her: She has two grandsons, one of whom is studying engineering in Bihar and the other one has a steady job. She has struggled a lot as a Madhubani artist because of not being able to make ends meet and hence decided to prioritize her children and grandchildren's education over anything else. She didn't want them to face the same hardships that she did and hence did not allow them to practice the art.</p> <p>Thoughts on the Mela: "I had higher expectations, they did not even give a proper stall. It is disrespectful to my art."</p> <p>"As much as it breaks my heart to not allow my children to carry forward the legacy of Madhubani, it is essential for their well-being and survival."</p>	

Box 3: Bina Pathar's Story

"Log samajhte hai ki yeh kala sadakpe, Colaba market mein milt ihai. Humari karigari aur shramaki koi keemat nahi rakhta hai." An artist selling silver jewellery quoted, translating to 'People think that you can find this art on the street or in a local market. They don't value our craftsmanship or hard work at all' (Nair, 2020). These weren't the sentiments of one artist alone but something most artists in the Mela felt.

3.3.2 Authenticity of the Mela

The proliferation of traders at the Surajkund Mela begs the larger question of its authenticity. As the Mela has scaled, with the number of stalls, stakeholders and consumers growing exponentially, a typical quantity versus quality contrast can be noticed. In 2020, commercialisation was observed to be running rampant through the Mela. Though a few stalls kept true to their craft and brought high quality, carefully crafted goods, most stalls were observed to be selling at least some mass produced items. To achieve this, some artists resorted to un-traditional forms of base materials and production while the others reduced the quality of

their work to create a higher quantity of pieces that they could sell for lower prices. Loyal patrons of the Mela have noticed this, and revealed that now they have to look carefully through the stalls to find the real artists who are actually creating art that they take utmost pride in.

Most consumers agree with the points stated above. Most visitors noted that the Mela did not feel authentic, and did not do justice to the cultures it aims to represent. They described the Mela as ‘artificial’, ‘commercialised’ and even as ‘a big, chaotic, shop’. Along the same tangent, Ms. Jaya Jaitly quoted in her interview “If foreigners go it’s because they are told that Surajkund Mela is a big crafts Mela but I would be ashamed to point out to foreigners about how little craft there is actually”. The very ticket of the Surajkund International Crafts Mela 2020 that every visitor received is a prime example. It featured a graphic featuring two exaggerated renditions of ‘artists’ with a backdrop of a typical fair: a ferris-wheel, roller-coaster and circus tent (all features the Mela does not possess), with only one hint at the Mela’s artists: a charkha or spinning wheel. This graphic was also used extensively for marketing, and featured in advertisements as well as the Mela’s official website.

Aesthetically, it can be noted that the organisation had tried hard to make the event seem rich in culture and authentic. Pop-up shows of various cultural artists dotted the landscape, and a lot of effort was put into the creation of the various gates that could be seen on the Mela grounds. The constant humdrum of the Mela was frequently interrupted by the sounds of one instrument or another as performing artists passed through, amassing a crowd of followers.

The decor of the Surajkund Mela is decided on the basis of the theme state each year. In 2020, this was Himachal Pradesh (“Surajkund International Crafts...”,n.d.). Though this was apparent in some places as Himachal Pradesh Tourism was hard at work trying to promote itself, this was not a steady trend throughout the Mela and did not add to its authenticity. A few attractions like open-air shows from Himachali artists were a welcome experience, but most elements aimed to incorporate Himachal Pradesh into the event seemed half-hearted and were futile. These included selfie-points, a theatre (three very low-resolution screens made up three walls of a room with a curtain on one side to enter through) that screened visuals from the state, multiple Himachal Tourism booths and a house that aimed to mimic what a traditional house looked like (it was a bare-bones two-storey house with minimal aesthetic touches). Artists and consumers who had been visiting the Mela for multiple years agreed that each year the theme state did not affect much, and some consumers from Himachal Pradesh that were interviewed were also disappointed with the representation of their home state. Amongst the large, sprawling food courts, only one stall from Himachal Pradesh was present in a corner, and it was difficult to sight.

Overall, the Mela was found to seem authentic enough for the average consumer who would visit for a few hours, but lack authenticity when looked into deeply.

3.3.3 Stalls

3.3.3.1 Commercial Stalls

To truly comprehend the commercialization of the Mela, it is important to understand how the congregation of these artists and traders takes place. According to Ms. Jaya Jaitly, the first few years of the Mela only had national and state award winners taking part (Jaitly, 2020). Initially, the people who were in charge of selecting artists were people who were well exposed and knew the artists personally making them ideal individuals to select. As the years passed by, the working committee of the Surajkund Mela: composed of various government officials such as IAS officers, was made responsible to invite artists to participate in the fair. The underlying problem here was that none of these officials hold any experience in art, so the quality of artists being brought in was sub-par.

Another colossal element contributing to the commercialisation of the Mela was that there are many traders that pose as artists and acquire funding for their stalls. Many deserving artisans lose out on their opportunities to be a part of the Mela and showcase their art because of this. The bigger, more successful artists started subletting or buying stalls from others to sell their goods. An artist from Kolkata, who works on hand embroidered bed sheets and pillowcases, stated that he owned 4-5 stalls in different parts of the Mela to make sure he sold all his goods.

It was also discovered that the commercial stalls at the Mela had their own application process. There were strict guidelines about what can and cannot be sold in these commercial stalls.

A sample of the commercial stall rents are as follows.

Gate 1 reserve price:

Normal stall (50) - Rs.1,50,000/- + Goods & Services Tax

Corner stall (4) - Rs.1,75,000/- + Goods & Services Tax

Gate 2 reserve price:

Normal stall (26) - Rs.99,000 + Goods & Services Tax

Corner stall (4) - Rs.1,25,000 + Goods & Services Tax (Ministry of Textiles GOI, 2017).

Many artists also believed that the process of allotment of stalls and zones was rigged. Since the Mela is extremely widespread, the location of one's stall has a direct impact on the sales made. The stalls that brought in revenue for the Mela were the ones placed centrally. Artists/Traders that paid a hefty fee to procure a stall, VIP stalls and stalls sponsored by corporate partners were the ones that stole the spots of authentic, hardworking artists who were pushed to a corner. Another problem was that the Mela was inaccessible to small local artists. You either had to be an established award winner, or be able to afford the exorbitant stall rent to participate in the Mela.

3.3.3.2 Food Stalls

The Surajkund Mela is well-known for its vast spread of food choices, but even here the authenticity is debatable. Walking into the food court, one is greeted by a blur of options. Food from different corners of the world can be found, with an emphasis on Indian cuisines. Stalls offering Rajasthani, Bihari, Gujarati, Punjabi, Chinese and Italian food meet the eye. Stalls range from small, singular ones selling tandoori chai to large ones offering wholesome meals. Street food like chaat, pani-puri, sweet corn and candy floss were also present, creating a vast food court. A stall from the Indian Institute of Hotel Management was also present, with students manning it.

The best-selling items were observed to be traditional North-Indian options like Chhole-Kulche, Chhole-Bhature, Paneer with Naan and Rajma Chawal. Snacks like Kachoris and Bhel were also popular. All kinds of beverages from Nimbu Soda to Kashmiri Tea were available. Other options included soft-drinks, tea, coffee, milkshakes and lassi. Desserts included piping hot GulabJamun, Jalebi, Rabri, Chuski and Kulfi.

While the spread was massive and offered consumers a large number of options, a trend most consumers noticed and the study observed was that everything was made in a rushed, careless manner, with very little attention given to customer service. Food-stall owners were questioned about this and they did agree. They even revealed that this was because they did not expect any repeat customers as the average consumer will only visit the Mela for one day, and eat only one meal. Thus, they did not care for customer loyalty and rushed service, often compromising quality (Kumar, 2020).

Another concern was the authenticity of the food. The stall claiming 'DillikiMashoorChaat' (Delhi's famous chaat) tasted nothing like the chaat found in Delhi. An interview was taken of the person manning a stall claiming to sell 'Bombay Bhelpuri: Jaipur kiMashoor' (Bombay Bhelpuri: Famous in Jaipur). While he admitted to rushing the orders he

received, he also revealed that he was neither from Bombay nor Jaipur (he was from Bihar, lived in Faridabad), and was just selling bhel under this false banner (Kumar, 2020). Multiple people like him were hired and put to work on stalls selling random items that their employer (Seth) ordered, not caring about the authenticity in the least. While this might not be the case with all stalls, it was alarming to see a large number of similar stalls in the food courts.

Amongst all these stalls, a huge Domino's Pizza stall stood out, which seemed to be doing surprisingly well. Other western brands included Redbull and Burger Barn, and all of these seemed very out of place at the Surajkund Mela, as they did not relate to the theme in the least. However, the interest they generated could be attributed to xenocentrism in middle-class Indian consumers, as these food items are seen as an aspiration.

The Mela's food court was a testament to its commercialisation. The stalls were not authentic, though they often advertised themselves as if they were. Food and beverages were over-emphasised and made into a larger part of the Mela than necessary, and ended up being one of the most popular points of interest for consumers. The average visitor spent a large chunk of his money at the food stalls, and this ended up being a distraction from the real highlights: the art.

3.3.4 Entertainment and Footfall

During its founding years, the Mela was carefully curated by a group of dedicated professionals, and art connoisseurs sifted through lists and carefully invited these artists to be a part of this Mela. While interviewing Ms. Jaya Jaitly, the well thought out picture of the original Mela she drew up, in no way resembled what the Mela has become today. Initially, the Mela was solely a platform for these authentic and talented artists. Slowly, to attract large crowds elements of entertainment were introduced. The organisers kept looking to increase footfall as they saw a direct spike in revenue from tickets, sponsors and stalls. The national and international dance, music and cultural performances contributed greatly to building the atmosphere of a Mela in its true essence. However, there were various events such as the fashion shows by Ritu Beri that in no way aligned themselves to the cause of the Mela. Numerous 'selfie-points': unconvincing replicas of landmarks around India were also placed around the grounds, and were observed to attract an immense number of visitors. These events and attractions tend to draw crowds that come there to look around and have a 'picnic' rather than understand and appreciate the art being displayed. 'Public hai, purchasing nahihai.' -a Pattachitra artist from Odisha stated. Translating to "The public is present, but there are no purchases being made" (Shyam, 2020). Unfortunately, this was observed to be a general consensus among the artists. Ms. Jaitly quotes, "cultural

programs are very exaggerated, the whole Mela is very simulated” -highlighting that a large extent of the problem isn’t just the sheer quantity of entertainment that inevitably steals the limelight from the arts, but also the quality of performances (Jaitly, 2020).

However, it is important to notice and acknowledge how these elements of entertainment have succeeded in increasing the footfall drastically. In today’s day and age, the only thing drawing people to an authentic arts and crafts Mela is the entertainment and cultural aspects of the Mela.


3.3.5 Consumer Behaviour

The diminishing authenticity of the event can be attributed to the changes in the Mela’s audience, and their interest. Most artists were disappointed in the response that they received from the visitors at the fair, with more people taking selfies with their products and stalls than actually being interested in their art form. To most of these visitors, the Mela was just that, a fair where they expected cheap articles that they could buy without much consideration. Few people were there for the art, most were there for fun.

Most artists felt like this was not their ideal demographic. An artist from Kashmir explained that he had shawls ranging from Rs. 500 to Rs. 5,00,000, but most people did not understand the value of the more expensive products, and either bought the cheaper variants or tried to negotiate a much cheaper deal for the expensive ones. He believed that in its earlier years, the Mela attracted consumers of a higher quality, who had respect and value for his art and him, but that currently the scenario was different. Artists are treated like shopkeepers, not national award-winners, and are not appreciated for the hard work they do, he felt. People neither know about their art forms, nor are they interested in learning about them. And this has affected sales as well. He quoted, “People expect Pashmina quality at cashmere prices, but that is just not possible” (Anonymous, 2020).

Unfortunately, interviews with consumers backed up this artist’s beliefs. Most consumers agreed that they were not at the Mela to appreciate art at all. They had fun experiencing the sights and sounds of the fair, maybe bought a couple items that caught their interest, visited the food court, and were on their way.

As the Mela has scaled, appreciation for the art found at it has dwindled, and artists are discouraged by this. Few consumers actually care about the background, culture and intricacies of the art, and most just move on with a quick look.

	<p>Name: Radha</p> <p>Place of Origin: Nainital, Uttarakhand</p> <p>Age: 46</p> <p>Occupation: Weaver</p>
<p>Thoughts on the Mela: “This is the second time I got the opportunity to come, and I see drastic changes. People have forgotten how to value real art and prefer to buy the cheaper goods. This is so sad to see as a weaver as I have been weaving since I can remember. Real art is dying and losing its importance.”</p>	

Box 4: Radha’s Story

Though the Mela appeals to a wider audience each year due to increased publicity and marketing, visitors come to the Mela mainly from the Delhi-NCR region. Apart from this, as discussed earlier, the Mela also allures other national and international visitors. While a lot of the people claimed to have come to the Mela as an outing or just a visit for entertainment, there were consumers who came to the Mela with some sort of intent in mind.

The Mela attracts people of all age groups, right from young children to the elderly. Every age group displayed a different shopping behaviour and interests. A young fashion student at the Mela told us that in her opinion, the current generation would not in particular wear the stuff being sold at the Mela, but find them very aesthetic and understand their authenticity. She quoted, ‘I don’t think people our age would wear the clothes here, at least I wouldn’t. They have beautiful cloth materials to create work from though.’ Secondary research also revealed that the purchasing power of the younger population is higher (Sharma, Uniyal, & Sajani, 2017). However, the older population seemed to be more interested in Home Decor, Clothing Materials and Stitched Clothing.

Consumer interviews revealed that a majority of the visitors wanted to just look around the fair and see if they found anything ‘trendy’ or in their interest. They were more concerned with the aesthetic look of the product and its price. This is in sync with how the Mela has expanded, becoming primarily a tourist destination. As most of the visitors were tourists that were visiting for the sole purpose of entertainment, their purchasing intent was low, and it can be noted that they were looking to purchase only souvenirs, and not culturally rich artwork.

Regular customers who had been visiting the Mela for many years were a great source of information to understand how it had changed. A group that had been visiting the Mela for about 18 years commented on how the authenticity of products in the Mela had reduced but the footfall had been consistently rising, making it extremely commercial. On being asked about the price of the products, they said that the prices at some stalls were reasonable while others have increased over the years. Having a keen interest in the handlooms and the handicrafts, they were equipped with the skills to judge an artist with respect to their authenticity and quality. But not everyone who visits the Mela now is fully aware and knowledgeable in the terms of the handlooms and handicrafts being sold.

One of the visitors at the Mela stated, “We only come here to look around and have fun. It is such a huge fair, it’s an international fair.” On being asked whether they have a preference for the local or international stalls, the majority of consumers stated that they like shopping at the local stalls due to the lower prices. but are more attracted to the international stalls and visit them more frequently. This was in check with what artists had to say about how most people visit foreign stalls as they are fascinated by them. This xenocentrism deeply affects the sales of these indigenous artists. When a customer was interviewed about the same, they stated, “Products sold in the Indian stalls are things I can find anywhere, but the international ones aren’t.”

One interesting factor that could be related to the consumers’ mind-set of the event could be the nomenclature itself. The word ‘Mela’ itself is synonymous with vibrancy, color, entertainment, food and cheap shopping. Thus, customers visit the Surajkund Mela with that certain expectation in their mind, and when they come across highly priced authentic art (some of which would be a better fit in an art gallery), it doesn’t match their expectations. This is also because a majority of customers that come have no appreciation or understanding of fine art which undoubtedly brings about the problem of bargaining. Due to the lack of knowledge, customers have over the years undervalued the time, work and effort that goes into creating art. Consciously or unconsciously, they end up undermining the effort of the artists and often exploit their work for a cheaper price. The artists have no choice but to cave into the price demanded by the customer because at the end of the day, they need the money, and each sale directly affects their livelihood.

3.3.6 Marketing

When it started out as a small-scale event, the Surajkund Mela did not engage in any forms of advertising or marketing. Owing to its increasing size, technological advancements and the ever growing social media platforms, Surajkund Mela has now grown to an international

level. Not only does it have international stalls and visitors but has also established itself globally as a prominent forum for arts and crafts.

Currently, the Mela invests in and focuses on PR and advertising on multiple platforms. The Surajkund Mela Tender Notice as stated by Haryana Tourism and Government of Haryana explicitly states hiring an agency for Planning Publicity Campaign in Print, Outdoor Hoarding and Electronic Indoor and Outdoor Media (“Haryana Tourism...”, 2020).

The forms of marketing included the following:

- Radio: Publicising the event through prominent radio channels in Delhi and NCR for a period of 21 days in accordance with the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity Rate. It required beginning the process around a week before the Mela, and continuing until the very end.
- TV Commercials: The agency created wide publicity on local news channels of Haryana and top-rated national news channels to run 20 second audio-visual ads.
- Outdoor Media: An efficient form of advertising was through the Metro Stations and Railways (“Haryana Tourism...”, 2020). Digital advertisements were screened at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, and digital screens at different commercial hubs of Delhi-NCR also supplemented this.
- Direct Marketing: Messages were sent out to individuals in the Delhi-NCR region.
- Social Media Marketing: Emphasis was laid upon publicity through Social Media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. These campaigns aimed at increasing awareness about the Mela, reaching varied demographics through these platforms and thus increasing the footfall of the Mela. There were daily updates on the Surajkund Mela’s Instagram and Facebook pages about various stalls, celebrity sightings and cultural programs that took place (“Haryana Tourism...”, 2020).

The marketing primarily focused on Surajkund as a destination for people in and around the NCR region to visit for an enjoyable day out, with emphasis on performances and celebrities; not much of the marketing was centred around the art that the Mela offered. Nevertheless, the marketing was successful and helped the event grow extensively to be recognised on a larger scale.

3.3.7 Third Party Involvement

The only sponsors at the inception of the Mela were the Department of Textiles, Development Commissioner (Handlooms) and Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). The Mela at this stage served a simple goal: to get the best artists from all over the country together and give them a platform to reach an audience from over the world. Since then, the number of third parties involved has grown manifold. This is one of the most important reasons in the commercialization of the event.

Some of the more recent stakeholders that have gotten involved are as follows:

BookMyShow is the Mela's official ticketing partner (as of 2020). Tickets went on sale a month prior to the opening and were available throughout the length of the event. This helped the Mela gain publicity and was a convenience for the visitors as they could skip the long queues at the ticket counters. Ticket checking staff at the gates were equipped with QR code scanners for the same.

For financial solutions, the Mela collaborated with various banks to provide visitors with numerous ATMs throughout the premises. In 2020, there were 2 ATMs by the State Bank of India, 1 by Indian Bank and 1 ATM by Punjab Bank. In 2017, Dena Bank was announced as the official banking partner who brought in Mobikwik as their official cashless mobile wallet partner (Garg, 2017).

Upon interviewing a few police officers, it was observed that Haryana Police was deeply involved with the Mela, ensuring security and order. Interviews with police officers revealed that there were around 220 CCTV camera systems around the grounds. A security team of about 2200 police personnel was deployed at the Mela, a portion of which was called in from other neighboring areas to be stationed there only for the event ("All set for 34th...", 2020).

Ms. Jaya Jaitly in her interview said that one of motives of the organizers has been to develop real estate in and around Surajkund. One of the reasons is to promote the various hotels, cottages and hospitality chains in Faridabad which benefit greatly due to the Mela. Most hotels were completely sold out during the days of the event, and the Mela converted the dry barren land around the Surajkund Mela Grounds into prime property where lush, multi-storey buildings and resorts now stand.

Ritu Beri, an Indian fashion designer, was the honorary advisor for 2020's Surajkund Mela: a key part in making major decisions about its organization. She had multiple stalls set up at the Mela and organized a fashion show. As most of her involvement at the event catered to her

personal interests, Ms. Jaya Jaitly believed that her participation as a part of the board as well as a commercial artist was unethical (Gupta, 2020).

While various government bodies were involved in the organization of the Mela, some of the most important ones to contribute to the commercialisation were the various state governments and the Haryana Tourism Department. Ms. Jaitly mentioned in her interview that these state governments are impersonal and callous when picking the theme state. “It’s just a job for them”- she quoted. As mentioned earlier when a theme state is selected, they are responsible for the decor, cultural performances and atmosphere of the Mela for which the state governments have started to hire event planners. Event planners who have no experience with the authentic art and culture of the state. The result of this is a generic, a loud and pretentious aesthetic which does not come close to reflecting the true essence of the state.

These are some of the very few corporate partners involved in the Mela. While some of these might seem to have benefited the Mela, most of them adversely affected it. As the Mela grew larger, more organizations were compelled to get involved to try to keep up with the uncontrolled expansion of the Mela. The attention of the organizers gradually shifted from their primary stakeholders, the artists, to the third parties. The Mela became centered around catering to the needs and interests of these third parties to the extent where the ethos of the Mela started to disappear. It ended up as not much more than a money minting machine.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusion



Image 11: Turkish Artist at the Istanbul Grand Bazaar Stall

The Surajkund International Crafts Mela has done a commendable job of expanding to become the largest crafts fair in the world, and in this journey, has grown to include a lot more than the handicrafts and handloom art it had been created for. The Mela has been very successful in increasing footfall and popularising itself internationally through aggressive marketing and the inclusion of various additional elements such as food, performances, international crafts, competitions, rides and other attractions by third parties. The Mela has also received the support of various government entities and sponsors that have helped it become the monumental event it is today.

While the Mela is very successful commercially, this uncontrolled growth it has seen has disconnected it from the goal it aimed to achieve. The artists who were supposed to be the main beneficiaries from the Mela are neglected and unhappy. The general sentiment amongst artists is negative, and multiple artists did not wish to come back for the following editions.

The introduction of traders who merely buy products from artists and sell them at the Mela has affected the event majorly. They provide unfair competition to the artists and do not further the motive of raising awareness and appreciation of the artforms presented, and the cultures behind them. The importance afforded to international stalls also deviates from the Mela's original purpose, and artists believe that they are stealing the visitors' attention and possible customers from them. Along with this, numerous forms of entertainment like fashion shows and selfie-points have been introduced for the visitors that steal the spotlight from the art presented. This and numerous other factors like the exaggeration of cultures in the performing arts and at stalls indicate that the Mela is not an accurate representation of the cultures it promotes, and is not as authentic as it claims to be.

Consumer behaviour is another factor that has had its influence on the Mela, and this too has changed over time. The nomenclature of the event, along with its portrayal through marketing and publicity suggests a fun, festive affair with various forms of entertainment and food, and an exaggeration of cultures. The event is not publicised as a pure, authentic art exhibition at all. This has worked to bring in more visitors, but has lowered the average consumer's purchasing intent and appreciation of art. Most visitors in recent years can be categorized as tourists, as opposed to the art connoisseurs the Mela attracted in its early years. This implies that their intent to purchase quality art for most consumers was low, and they prioritised the purchase of souvenirs. Artists have noticed this trend, and have made changes in their craft to conform to this new range of customers. They have tried to reduce production costs by lowering the quality of their raw materials and switching traditional methods of creating the art for modern solutions, as it helps them produce more pieces in less time. This emphasis on

quantity over quality from the artists' perspective has lowered the authenticity of the pieces they present at the Mela, and the few art connoisseurs that do visit the Mela expressed their annoyance at it. The visitors looking for authentic artwork had to carefully filter through the stalls, looking for artists displaying their own art amongst a myriad of traders, and inspect closely the quality of the art to see if it was the artform in its true unadulterated sense.

The evolution of the Mela has sidetracked it from the goal it had set out to achieve: 'To preserve the languishing arts & crafts of India' ("At a glance...", 2020). The Mela in its current state is a tourist attraction more than anything else, with a major focus on entertaining a mass of visitors. This is beneficial to the organisers as it maximises footfall, increasing revenue through ticket sales, and attracts more sponsors. This shift has changed the general perception of the Mela from a premium, expertly curated art showcase to an enjoyable 'sightseeing' trip for most visitors. Consumers, artists and experts conclusively agree that the essence of the Surajkund Crafts Mela has been ruined by its uncontrolled growth, and it can be observed that the organisation has shifted its vision of the Mela from 'A Platform to Showcase India's Best Art' to just 'The World's Largest Crafts Mela', which is mentioned proudly on multiple channels. The emphasis rests on the scale of the event, and not the quality.

In today's deeply rooted capitalist society, it may become difficult for one to identify the trends of commercialisation. It's easy for something as pure as art to be corrupted by the capitalistic tendencies of today's world where individuals are looking out for their own monetary benefit. This phenomenon is not exclusive of the Surajkund Mela. The Mela is representative of various trends and changes that are seen around the world. The unadulterated intentions of the Mela to uplift artists in the beginning gradually moved towards becoming more commercial. A platform to showcase the best of India's culture and heritage may have evolved to become the largest fair of its kind, and a monumental event that attracts international interest, but unfortunately seems to have boiled down to yet another example of culture becoming a commodity.

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